

## Book Reviews

**Alcázar, Josefina. *La cuarta dimensión del teatro: Tiempo, espacio y video en la escena moderna*. 2nd ed. México, D.F.: Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes y Literatura, 2011: 213 pp.**

Josefina Alcázar frames her impressive study on time, space, and video in twentieth and twenty-first century theatre by reminding the reader that technology and art have always been inseparable in Western history. From the ancient *deus ex machina* to the contemporary use of computer-aided holographic projection, creators and spectators of theatre alike have been impacted by technology, both within the performative space as well as in the greater cultural and philosophical milieu. In addition to guiding the reader through the ways that advances have changed not only our understanding of theatrical performance, but also our perception of time and space, Alcázar argues that technological innovations have become dramatic elements in themselves, allowing creators, performers, and spectators to explore ideas, worlds, and concepts that would otherwise be left unexamined.

The revised and expanded *La cuarta dimension del teatro* follows a mostly chronological organization. In the first chapter, Alcázar surveys technological advances of the last two millennia through the lens of how advances have modified our perception of time and space, creating a reciprocal relationship in which reality informs art; and art, likewise, informs reality. Alcázar highlights creative pioneers who utilized cutting-edge innovations in late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries such as Adophe Appia, who saw the possibility of using light for more than simple illumination, Edward Gordon Craig, who used light to create three-dimensional scenography, and Max Reinhardt, who revolutionized theatrical production with the revolving stage.

Alcázar then shifts her focus to how scientific, technological, and philosophical advances of the twentieth century have influenced theatre. Expertly guiding the reader through quantum mechanics, cubism, and futurist manifestos, among other topics, Alcázar shows how the avant-garde, both artistic and scientific, forever changed our notion of time and space and how these are portrayed in theatre. Alcázar highlights the confluence of film and the Commedia dell'Arte in Vsevolod Meyer-

hold's biomechanics in order to set the stage for the core of her work, the exploration of the fourth dimension of theatre, as coined by the director of epic theatre Erwin Piscator, to describe the role of cinematographic images projected onto a screen. Alcázar traces the development of contemporary Western theatre through the influence of Bauhaus, Total Art, the New York avant-garde, the Happenings and performance art of the 1960s, emphasizing the use of photographic and cinematographic projection in brief descriptions of selected works from European, North American, and Mexican theatre and performance art. The author discusses how television, videotape, and feedback change our perception of reality in which time becomes non-linear, space is compressed, and collage replaces causality. Here Alcázar gives examples of Robert Wilson's "theater of images" as well as other examples of non-narrative and deconstructed theatre.

The final two chapters of the book are perhaps the most instructive as Alcázar delves into contemporary performance art, a field which she has investigated extensively. In particular, Alcázar describes in greater detail representative performance pieces, dramatic works, and cybernetic body art by mostly Mexican performers that would not be well-known to the general public. In the final chapter, "Video y teatro", Alcázar's text takes on an apologist tone, arguing for the value of the incorporation of video and new technologies in theatre before cataloguing the use of video on the Mexican stage during the last three decades.

Alcázar's text is at its best when analyzing specific uses of technology in theatre as well as how our perception of time and space has influenced as well as been influenced by theatre and art. Also illuminating is the impressive collection that accompanies the text of images and stills from European, North American, and Latin America theatre and performance art of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. The pace of the text slows down somewhat when Alcázar dwells a bit too long on topics such as the history and impact of television. This can be forgiven, however, since this contextualization helps to build her argument that art and innovation have always been and should continue to be complementary. As such, this is a book that would be of great value to readers who wish to survey the relationship between technology, science, and theatre as well as those wanting to investigate specific works of performance art and theatre that make use of cybernetics, computers, and video to explore a reality that, as Alcázar shows, is constantly in a state of flux.

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**Franco, Israel y Antonio Escobar, coords. *El Teatro de Ahora: un primer ensayo de teatro político en México*. México: CITRU-INBA, 2011: 380 pp.**

Este libro coordinado por Israel Franco y Antonio Escobar, investigadores del CITRU (Centro Nacional de Investigación Teatral “Rodolfo Usigli”, de México) nos ofrece no sólo una perspectiva del movimiento denominado Teatro de Ahora a través de un trabajo colectivo de búsqueda y rastreo documental. Teatro de Ahora, considerado como una de las experiencias más influyentes de la creación teatral mexicana del siglo pasado, se impone en este libro como forma para comprender mejor lo que un movimiento teatral puede generar en todo el ámbito de la reconfiguración de la conciencia social de un país en un determinado momento. Si revisamos las historias generales —pocas por cierto— del teatro mexicano, veremos que en la visión panorámica el Teatro de Ahora no pasa de ser una más de las experiencias de grupos y movimientos que surgieron en el período posrevolucionario, siempre debajo en importancia de lo que los miembros de Contemporáneos hicieron en sus experiencias escénicas del Teatro de Ulises y posteriormente el Teatro Orientación. Lo que ofrece el libro en su conjunto es materia suficiente para contradecir lo que suele apuntarse al respecto.

*El Teatro de Ahora* recoge así la experiencia y las aportaciones de este movimiento teatral bajo el mismo nombre en cuatro grandes secciones a saber: “Un referente posible en el teatro en México,” “Re-visitaciones al Teatro de Ahora,” “Escrituras de referencia: re-construcciones de las políticas de las artes en México” y una última parte que contiene los Pronunciamentos a propósito de El Teatro de Ahora y una entrevista a Juan Bustillo Oro realizada por Marcela Magdaleno. A estos cuatro capítulos o partes, hay que añadir un invaluable disco compacto que contiene imágenes y documentos de gran valor para la historia de este movimiento teatral y en general de la historia del teatro mexicano de la primera mitad del siglo XX.

Al observar el contexto cultural y el momento histórico en que se planteó el Teatro de Ahora podremos comprender que, definitivamente, para la vida cultural y política en el México de los años treinta, la práctica discursiva del movimiento resultaba enormemente congruente para la realidad social del país y al mismo tiempo modernizadora para la un tanto anquilosada escena de entonces. Las opiniones contrarias que llegó a recibir en su propuesta por parte de la crítica teatral o de miembros de Contemporáneos —en concreto de Salvador Novo, quien se mofaba de ellos llamándoles “El teatro del mes antepasado,”— se entienden más bien dentro de las pugnas entre facciones y proyectos culturales posrevolucionarios que fundadas críticas a su propuesta artística. O como el mismo Juan Bustillo Oro lo menciona en una entrevista realizada por Marcela Magdaleno que se incluye en el libro: “Teníamos muchas envidias, había mucha dificultad para expresar nuestras ideas” (371). Vale la pena revisar por ello tanto los documentos relativos al Teatro de Ahora, testimoniales y hemerográficos que vienen incluidos en el libro en un disco

compacto (“Documentos para la historia del Teatro de Ahora”), como también lo es echar un vistazo a los artículos escritos *ex profeso* por especialistas en historia y en arte mexicano posrevolucionario, como es el caso del texto de Esther Cimet, “De Calles y el callismo: política (cultural) y artes plásticas” (183-222), así como el artículo de Miguel Ángel Vásquez Meléndez: “Dos perspectivas; la época y los textos de Mauricio Magdaleno” (285-309).

Es claro, de acuerdo con lo que se plantea como objetivo en el libro, que la práctica discursiva del movimiento Teatro de Ahora está inmersa en un campo de acción cultural de largo alcance y que responde a un movimiento no sólo de carácter nacionalista, sino a una necesidad de renovar y transformar el arte y la vida en un país que comenzaba a encontrar cauces para su tránsito hacia la modernidad. Llama por ello la atención, que por esos años los discursos teatrales emblemáticos comenzaron a sufrir transformaciones. Se renueva la dramaturgia, el Teatro de Ulises propone por primera vez un modelo de teatro de arte en la ciudad de México. Un hecho significativo, por cierto, fue que el viejo Teatro Principal, símbolo de la tradición escénica nacional, se incendia y queda en ruinas en el mismo año en que comienzan a consolidarse los nuevos movimientos en las artes y en el teatro (1931). Así también para esas fechas el proyecto de construcción del Gran Teatro Nacional es retomado y se reinician los trabajos para culminar finalmente, después de más de veinte años, en la edificación final del Palacio de Bellas Artes, inaugurado en 1934. Y otro dato curioso es que en 1931 Rodolfo Usigli inicia también su labor como dramaturgo al escribir su primera obra, reconocida por él mismo como “teatro a tientas,” *El apóstol*. Y en ese año también Julio Bracho abre las actividades del proyecto teatral conocido como Teatro Orientación con el montaje de *Proteo* de Francisco Monterde.

Hay pues en *El Teatro de Ahora*, no una curiosa experiencia de teatro posrevolucionario, sino una práctica discursiva coherente con el discurso crítico de intelectuales y el discurso estético-ideológico de buena parte de las vanguardias artísticas del México posrevolucionario. Y en cuanto a los intelectuales, baste referirse a la conferencia del licenciado Luis Cabrera dictada en 1931 en la Biblioteca Nacional y titulada “Balance de la Revolución”, que causó escozor en el gobierno de Pascual Ortiz Rubio, al grado tal que se le intentó enviar al exilio por atreverse a cuestionar a fondo la realidad del México posrevolucionario. Y la relación con el Teatro de Ahora es directa. Justamente a finales de 1931 Juan Bustillo Oro exponía también en una conferencia previa al inicio de las actividades escénicas del Teatro de Ahora que se trataba de hacer un teatro “que midiera la temperatura de nuestros días,” que legítimamente hiciera un balance de la realidad nacional de aquel entonces. Y la mejor muestra de ello no sólo fueron las palabras de Bustillo Oro, sino su obra *San Miguel de las Espinas*, estrenada por Julio Bracho en 1932 y que generó, si no una censura declarada, sí amagos por censurarla, precisamente porque hacía desde el teatro mismo un “balance de la Revolución”.

*El Teatro de Ahora: un primer ensayo de teatro político en México* es un libro modelo, el cual atrae a sus lectores a través de su magnífica investigación en torno a un tema de importancia histórica mientras también entabla una sólida relación entre el pasado teatral y la práctica escénica en México a mayor escala.

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**García Barrientos, José-Luis (director). *Análisis de la dramaturgia cubana actual*. La Habana: Editorial Alarcos, 2011: 444 pp.**

Nada menos que comparar el estado de la dramaturgia actual en lengua española en diversos países sirviéndose de un método claramente acotado con el cual se pueda responder pertinentemente a cuestiones culturales como, “por ejemplo, si puede hablarse de una dramaturgia actual en español, descriptible y diferenciada, o se trata solo de la suma de diferentes dramaturgias locales” (11). Este es el objetivo con el que nació el proyecto *Análisis de la dramaturgia actual en español*, dirigido por José-Luis García Barrientos, del Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas de España.

El volumen *Análisis de la dramaturgia cubana actual* es el primer fruto palpable de este proyecto, al que seguirán otros sobre la dramaturgia de México, Argentina y España. El método de análisis dramatólogo que explora tanto este libro como los que están por venir es el que ha establecido y desarrollado José-Luis García Barrientos en múltiples estudios, que se encuentra expuesto en toda su extensión en *Cómo se comenta una obra de teatro. Ensayo de método* (Madrid: Síntesis, 2001) y que ha sido valorado por Jean-Marie Schaeffer en el *Nuevo diccionario enciclopédico de las ciencias del lenguaje* como “el análisis más profundo de la estructura dramática” hasta este día. La *dramatología* (y, por consiguiente, el libro que aquí nos ocupa también) tiene como objeto de estudio el drama —esto es, el modo teatral de representar ficciones— y se propone establecer el significado de cada una de las categorías principales que lo constituyen (espacio, tiempo, personaje y visión del espectador), así como de su estructura textual. El lector de *Análisis de la dramaturgia cubana actual* encontrará un “Resumen del método” en las primeras páginas del libro.

En este colaboran tres investigadores cubanos (Ulises Rodríguez Febles, Abel González Melo y Laura Ruiz) y tres extranjeros (Federico López Terra, uruguayo; Cristophe Herzog, suizo, y el propio García Barrientos), que se enfrentan a la obra de Amado del Pino, Ulises Rodríguez Febles, Nara Mansur, Lilian Susel Zaldívar de los Reyes, Norge Espinosa y Abel González Melo. Cada uno de los investigadores presenta dos capítulos, el primero de los cuales analiza en profundidad una obra representativa del autor en cuestión, mientras que el segundo destaca los rasgos característicos de su dramaturgia en conjunto.

La estructura de los análisis es también la misma para todos los autores, lo que permite llevar a cabo el objetivo propuesto de facilitar la comparación. Así, por ejemplo, la lectura de los respectivos epígrafes dedicados a la estructura textual de cada uno de los autores pone ante nuestros ojos un panorama transversal de las opciones que los dramaturgos eligen en este aspecto —que van del extremo de la ausencia de acotaciones hasta el extremo de la hipertrofia de las muy literarias y narrativas. Este panorama se complementa con la interpretación del investigador respecto al aspecto que se trata, con lo que cada apartado del análisis establece el valor de las elecciones estéticas de los autores en el contexto de sus contemporáneos y como parte del significado de sus dramaturgias.

Este doble objetivo de interpretación de la obra de un autor y definición de unos patrones claros para la comparación lo cumplen todos los ensayos, pero el acierto es especialmente satisfactorio en los dedicados por Christophe Herzog a la pieza *Ignacio y María*, de Nara Mansur, y por José-Luis García Barrientos a la dramaturgia de Abel González Melo. Es admirable que, inmediatamente tras una lectura de los ensayos de este volumen cubano, se desprenden claramente ciertas tendencias en la dramaturgia de este país caribeño. Entre ellas, cabe señalar la recurrencia del tema familiar (trasunto, en sus conflictos, compromisos y distancias, de toda una isla) y la frecuente ausencia de acción dramática, acompañada de acotaciones irrepresentables en muchos casos.

Pero, dejando aparte el valor intrínseco del volumen que nos ocupa, lo que todo estudioso del teatro en lengua española debe saludar con albricias es el nacimiento de este proyecto, que, gracias al riguroso análisis de la creación teatral más representativa de los últimos años, supone un verdadero avance hacia la identificación de los rasgos comunes de la dramaturgia hispana actual (o de la ausencia de estos). Quedamos, pues, a la espera del volumen dedicado a México.

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**John, Suki. *Contemporary Dance in Cuba: Técnica Cubana as Revolutionary Movement*. North Carolina: McFarland & Company, 2012: 231 pp.**

This recent work on the development of the Cuban dance technique known as *la técnica cubana*, is an ambitious endeavor to offer various perspectives on the role of dance in Cuban life. Defined as a collective effort to synthesize external influences, such as U.S.-based modern dance techniques with internal artistic practices, such as *orisha* dances, *la técnica cubana* is a fundamentally Cuban dance form. For the author, the dance form and its bodies not only reflect the impact of political and historical developments, but also are prime examples of Cuba's processes of transculturation.

John details the trajectory of *la técnica cubana* as it relates to politics and history, transforming these ideas and institutions into the dance form's leading performers. The book's structure does not follow a strictly linear or chronological sequence of events, but rather addresses specific themes as they relate to *la técnica cubana*. Chapters 1, 8, 9, 13, and 14 focus on the political contributions, while chapters 2, 3 and 12 discuss historical developments. The author highlights the ways in which sanctions, embargos, and revolutionary ideologies have paradoxically contributed to the formation of unique artistic practices. John provides a brief, yet thorough, discussion of Cuba's history from colonization to its present state. Within that discussion, the author signals how past political, racial and social divisions have impacted Cuba's current condition. Focusing on *la técnica cubana*, John argues that it could only have developed and flourished in the Cuban context, despite the country's economic fragility and political restrictions.

In order to capture the complex relationships between dance, politics, and history, John explores how the National School for the Arts (la ENA), created and financed by the Revolutionary government, has facilitated rich developments in dance. Chapter 8 details how dancers possess an elevated status that facilitates their movement not only within Cuba, but also internationally. These bodies in motion transmit government-sanctioned content as models for community outreach and enrichment in places such as the rural countryside and factories. Connecting present-day Cuban policies and the arts, Chapter 12 explores the impact of gasoline rationing during what is known as the "Special Period" through the dance piece, "La espera." Motivated by the way in which nearly every Cuban constantly waits for some kind of working transportation, John includes personal reactions, describing the languid bodies of the dancers and those on the streets of La Habana. The author creates the sensation that *la técnica cubana* does not only reflect daily life, but that daily life is experienced as a kind of dance, a series of stylized movements.

Outlining the development of *la técnica cubana*, John posits the dance form as an exemplary model for examining the syncretic facets of Cuban culture more broadly. From the first line of the book, the dance form is described as an effort to capture the essence of *cubanía*; the way Cuban bodies move "de cierta manera". *La técnica cubana* relies on its dancers to synthesize formal training with corporeal knowledge that comes from distinctly Cuban experiences like cutting sugar cane or becoming entranced by Yoruban gods. In this sense, John presents the common way Cuban bodies move as stylized. In chapters 4-7 and 10-12, John provides details and concrete examples of the dance form's movement vocabulary, training exercises, and descriptions of productions. Combining Afro-inspired dances such as rumba, folkloric dance practices such as the contradanza, and international influences such as the Soviet Imperial Ballet, *la técnica cubana* signals the embeddedness of Fernando Ortiz's transculturation.



Employing academic, personal, historical, and current accounts of Cuba, John expressed the polyvocal quality inherent in many Cuban dance and musical forms. Through contextual historical and political developments, the author weaves personal reflections and interviews with dancers and choreographers to reveal *la técnica cubana's* most important attribute: its ability to react and adapt to its environment. In contrast to its United States counterpart, this modern dance form thrives on cultural and artistic collaboration. As Chapter 14 details, as a result of John's own participation as a visiting instructor, *la técnica cubana* began to incorporate a broader United States modern dance vocabulary that was underdeveloped in Cuban dancers. It is this ability to incorporate different dance styles that has made Cuban *técnica* dancers some of the most versatile and sought after.

John's work is a pertinent interdisciplinary approach to the ways in which historical, political, and artistic knowledge coalesce and provide insight into a specific society. Yet, at times, the author's political and historical explorations overshadow the importance of *la técnica cubana* as its own entity. This is most noticeable in the structure of the book, as details of dance form do not appear until Chapter 4 and develop over a series of chapters. However, this is a well-researched work that signals the imperative to consider dance as a non-textual expression of socio-cultural developments and practices.

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**Layera, Ramón and Katie Gibson. *You Have Nothing to Learn from Me: A Literary Relationship Between George Bernard Shaw and Rodolfo Usigli*. Oxford, Ohio: Miami University Libraries, 2011: 53 pp.**

Although the title *You Have Nothing to Learn from Me* suggests that this volume is a presentation of the literary relationship between George Bernard Shaw and Rodolfo Usigli, it is actually an annotated English translation of a later edition of Usigli's detailed description of his two visits with Shaw<sup>1</sup> (*Conversaciones y encuentros*. México: Editorial Novaro, 1974). Both editions are accompanied by photographs of the notes Shaw sent to Usigli and a transcription of the letters Usigli sent to Shaw. However, whereas the edition in Spanish has over 50 still shots of the video Usigli filmed during the second visit in 1945, in this edition there is only one.

The foreword in this edition by Kelly Powell, Chair of the Department of English and specialist in Victorian Theatre, describes the context of the original conversation between the Mexican and Irish playwrights, which took place at the Ayot St. Lawrence on March 31 and April 12 (iv-vii). Usigli, the "playwright of the Mexican Revolution," had a literary and personal obsession with the Irish author Shaw. During Usigli's time as the secretary of the Mexican Embassy in Paris, from



1944-1946, he wrote to Shaw in order to meet with him. The elderly Shaw politely dismissed him on four occasions, hence Usigli decided to drop by unexpectedly. Shaw graciously received him in that moment, and then again a couple of weeks later.

The foreword, acknowledgements, notes, and introduction also describe the nature of the documents of the Usigli Archive, housed in the Havinghurst Special Collections Library, at Miami University in Oxford, Ohio. The Archive is the “definitive collection” (Layera 114) relating to Usigli’s life and literary influences. In the introductory material, Powell also narrates the long journey of the over 200,000 items that form the Archive. An electronic link to the Special Collections webpage allows access to an index of the materials (<http://spec.lib.muohio.edu>); and a link to the Usigli webpage gives access to the notes of this book (<http://usigli.lib.muohio.edu>), as well as to a slideshow of pictures and drawings. The rest of the materials must be viewed in person.

The introduction also provides an overview of the life and works of both authors within the sociopolitical background of London in 1944. This edition’s translation was done by Katie Gibson, the Humanities Librarian at the Miami University Libraries, and Ramón Layera, specialist in Usigli and Emeritus professor of Spanish and Latin American Studies at Miami University. Moreover, according to Powell, Layera is the one who arranged for the Usigli papers to be placed at Miami. This edition also includes the eulogy Usigli wrote for Shaw in 1950 and a conclusion with a narration of Usigli’s participation in the production of the film *Androcles and the Lion* in 1949.

The letters Shaw (and/or his secretary) sent to Usigli include the dismissive note from November 22, 1944, which is the one that gives the title to this edition. It also contains a photograph of Shaw’s often quoted one-page response to *Crown of Shadows*, “Mexico can starve you, but it cannot deny your genius” (43). Usigli meticulously describes all the correspondence between the two playwrights, the feelings of hope and rejection he felt upon receiving the notes, and his obsession that culminated in the two visits in 1945. Additionally, this edition incorporates critical footnotes, which contextualize the literary exchange. The conversational tone is maintained and the idiomatic expressions are updated in the translation, seemingly in an attempt to accommodate the English-speaking readers of today.

The last anecdote presented in this edition seems to reinforce the idea that Shaw actually meant to say that Usigli was a genius, which, according to Usigli, wasn’t quite believed by his Mexican friends (and enemies). When Gabriel Pascal, the Hungarian director and producer of the aforementioned film, told Shaw that the script needed a translation in Spanish, Shaw asked who would do it. Usigli’s name was mentioned and Shaw replied “Usigli? The Mexican? Oh, that’s all right, I know him” (50). This acknowledgement apparently served as proof that the admiration was mutual.

This edition offers a pleasant glimpse into the relationship between these two playwrights. It includes numerous critical footnotes and contextualizing introductory material that supply sufficient background and context to make the exchange of letters comprehensible to the non-specialist. It is also the first English translation of the conversation, which makes Usigli's account accessible to English speakers.

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### Notes

<sup>1</sup> First published in Spanish in *Cuadernos americanos*, Nov-Dec 1946: 249-75 and Jan-Feb 1947: 227-50.

**Rizk, Beatriz J., ed. *Paradigmas recientes en las artes escénicas latinas y latinoamericanas (Current Trends in Latino and Latin American Performing Arts)*. Miami: Ediciones Universal, 2010: 237 pp.**

Este libro, una edición bilingüe que contiene artículos de investigadores pertenecientes a instituciones norteamericanas y latinoamericanas, se presenta como un volumen de estudios culturales que refleja los “deslizamientos paradigmáticos” de las artes escénicas latinoamericanas durante los primeros diez años del siglo XXI. Son dieciséis artículos —14 escritos en español y 2 en inglés— nacidos al amparo de los Eventos Especiales con Finalidad Educativa del Festival Internacional de Teatro Hispano de Miami. Editado por Beatriz Rizk y publicado en el 2010, el volumen celebra, además, los veinticinco años de este insigne festival.

Los ensayos demuestran la multiplicidad “eclectica” de la realidad latinoamericana, con diversos enfoques y puntos de vista que caracterizan al modernismo y al post-modernismo. El libro analiza, además, el fenómeno de la globalización en el teatro latinoamericano. El resto de los artículos se sitúa en la encrucijada de los dos grandes temas anteriores y trata de contestar a la pregunta ¿en qué momento empieza o termina la relación post-modernista y la globalización? En resumen y como señala Rizk, este volumen presenta “una diversidad de miradas y posiciones que nos permite acercarnos, aunque sea someramente pero con rigurosa perspicacia, a la riqueza ineludible que presentan las artes escénicas contemporáneas ya no sólo en el continente latinoamericano sino en el mismo territorio que comparte con Estados Unidos” (xii-xiii).

Los diversos estudios parten de las premisas de que el arte no es sólo un producto sino que conlleva una idea, un proceso y unas herramientas determinadas para desarrollarse, los conceptos de teatralidad y representación se plantean como términos que exceden al teatro y su análisis implica una desconstrucción de su significado

tradicional. Es decir, el concepto de teatralidades es plural y se considera desde las prácticas escénicas actuales que son múltiples y diversas, que suceden dentro de un teatro canónico pero también fuera de las taxonomías tradicionales que se encuentran en los bordes de lo teatral: arte y vida y vida y arte. De la totalidad de los ensayos podemos sacar las siguientes conclusiones: la realidad es un producto cultural y un discurso social. El trabajo artístico colectivo se erige como alternativa válida y como medio de integrar a la sociedad en la creación. El fenómeno teatral, ahora, busca humanizar lo deshumanizado, se democratiza y se analiza desde una perspectiva intercultural e interdisciplinaria; la performance adquiere mayor importancia y pasa a incluir fotografías, videos e instalaciones vinculadas a problemáticas políticas y sociales. El teatro ya no responde sólo a un enfoque textual-interpretativo-realista sino que ahora se favorece un teatro más estético que no se basa exclusivamente en la mimesis, que da la palabra a colectivos que antes no tenían acceso a él y posee un público más activo que participa en la construcción de nuevos espacios de intercambio. El concepto de espacio como constructo cultural se adapta a las circunstancias político-sociales específicas de los personajes, incorpora estrategias performativas en espacios no acotados por instituciones culturales, se abre a lugares públicos y se transforma en un espacio de relativizaciones, de desestabilizaciones y de nuevas posibilidades de conexiones. Finalmente, los ensayos demuestran que el rol del actor ha cambiado y que el cuerpo del actor, su accionar, su materialidad son el principal soporte de la creación artística.

El volumen editado por Rizk desafía el estatismo de las convenciones tradicionales del teatro y obliga a una apropiación de la responsabilidad por parte de la sociedad civil. Más aun, prueba que el teatro contemporáneo es una experiencia total—artística, ética y técnica en constante desarrollo—que mantiene su capacidad crítica y que sigue asentado en la realidad socio-política y las circunstancias de los individuos. Es lectura obligatoria para quienes quieren mantenerse al día sobre lo que sucede en materia teatral en el diverso mundo latinoamericano y latino en los Estados Unidos.

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**Sandner, Rowena. *Konstruktionen der Konquista im Umfeld des Quinto Centenario. Mediale Inszenierungen im mexikanischen Drama und Film*. Hildesheim, Zürich, New York: Georg Olms, 2012: 440 pp.**

*Konstruktionen der Konquista im Umfeld des Quinto Centenario* (Constructing the Conquest around the Fifth Centenary. Media-based Productions in Mexican Drama and Film) draws on literature and cultural studies to explore images of the Conquest in Mexican dramas and films produced in the environment of the 1992

celebrations (1968-2000), although Ridley Scott's *1492-Conquest of Paradise* has also been analyzed as an example of US-American and European neo-colonial discourse from which most Mexican authors and directors distance themselves, not only with regard to the messages they are trying to disseminate, but also due to substantially different objectives, conditions and budgets for production and marketing.

Sandner's first three chapters explore the discursive framework in preparation for the text analysis. After an overall convincing introduction, the author focuses on the development of the so called Conquista discourse, a term which tries to summarize the wide spectrum of socio-political and cultural perspectives on the Conquest from colonial times to the celebrations of 1992 and beyond. While one could argue that this chapter is a bit descriptive and fragmentary, and that there might be room for improvement with regard to the overall structure (rather than starting with 1992 and then introducing the colonial context, it might have been clearer and less repetitive to start with the colonial discourse and explore the celebrations as part of neo-colonial politics), there can be no doubt that it gives a very informative, detailed and in-depth account of key perspectives on the Conquest. Particularly interesting is the third chapter insofar as it explores the aesthetic specifics and narrative codes of each medium, which helps to ensure the necessary differentiation within the text analysis chapters.

The text corpus for this analysis embraces directors of different generations, including Hugo Argüelles, Sergio Magaña, Sabina Berman, Alejandro Galindo and Juan Mora Catlett, which at the end allows Sandner to develop a sound overview of the new narrative of the Conquest in Mexico. However, in chapter 4, the author prefers to start with Scott's *1492* in order to establish a contrasting background ('Kontrastfolie') for the exploration of Mexican productions. The idea itself is interesting in methodological terms, e.g. for a teaching program in which students could be encouraged to gather aspects of neo-colonial discourse from the film instead of starting from lecture notes (inductive <-> deductive). Admittedly, I am less convinced that it has to be an essential part of this PhD project, because the patterns of (neo-) colonial discourse are well researched and *1492* has little else to offer, as Sandner confirms (134). Also, it is perhaps not entirely convincing to build up Scott's film to a key example of traditional discourse, since in many ways it is not representative of Spanish perspectives and a significant part of the Mexican narrative explored in this thesis could not draw on it (i.e. no 'contrasting background' or intertextual reference point for them), simply due to an earlier completion date. On the other hand, Sandner summarizes key research on *1492* quite convincingly and she adds interesting elements to it (e.g. parallels in composition between shots from the film and images from the Florentine code, 123), so the reader might as well accept chapter 4 as an additional extra.

In any case, the analysis of Mexican narrative starts with chapter five, and it is overall well structured according to key aspects of individual work. Under 'identity

discourse', Sandner explores Alejandro Galindo's *El juicio de Martín Cortés*, both as drama (1969) and film (1974), Sergio Magaña's *Los enemigos* (1984), Juan Mora Catlett's *Retorno a Aztlán* (1990) and Hugo Argüelles' *Águila real* (1992). As parts of a 'transculturality discourse', she analyses Sergio Olhovich's play *Una hoguera al amanecer* (1990) and its film adaptation *Bartolomé de las Casas. La leyenda negra* (1993), but also Salvador Carrasco's *La otra conquista* and, somehow implicitly within the discussion of transculturality, Nicolás Echevarría's *Cabeza de Vaca* (1991, 226-32, 294ff.). Finally, under 'postmodern versions of history', there are interpretations of Sabina Berman's *Águila o sol* (1984), Vicente Lenero's *La noche de Hernán Cortés* (1992) and Víctor Hugo Rascón Banda's *La Malinche* (1998). In all cases, the reader can expect a well-written text analysis based on established as well as recent and sometimes unacknowledged secondary sources. The study is very well researched, its line of argumentation is clear and coherent, and the aesthetic specifics and narrative codes of theatre and film are well integrated into the analysis. The author also succeeds in her elaboration of intertextual and intermedial references, for which she can draw on an impressive knowledge of 16<sup>th</sup> century chronicles that appear as key reference points in the narrative.

Far less convincing, however, is the theoretical underpinning insofar as the author's definitions of the three concepts lack elaboration and, consequently, the categorization of individual primary sources as part of one discourse vis-à-vis another remains to be discussed. A good example for both challenges is Sandner's work on what she calls the transculturality discourse. Instead of entering into the contemporary discussion, marked by different and partially very conflictive views from Welsch, Mecklenburg, Delanoy, Huggan and Antor, to name just a few scholars heating up the debate in the last 15 years, Sandner establishes her position from some rather basic ideas voiced by Fernando Ortiz in the 1940s, and that without consulting Ortiz's work directly (instead, she refers to Rama's summary from the 1980s). The remaining six pages of the eight-page section devoted to the transculturality concept are then used for an interpretation of Echevarría's film *Cabeza de Vaca*, which on the one hand helps to understand the potential blurring of boundaries between Spanish and Indian perspectives, i.e. transculturality on the basis of one precise example, but on the other hand causes confusion because *Cabeza de Vaca* has also been explored as a postmodern film by most of the authors this thesis draws on, including Floeck and Rings. While Sandner recognises that her categories are overlapping and that most of her primary sources could be explored in more than one respect, e.g. as both transcultural and postmodern work, the need to define these categories more clearly remains.

Overall, I would recommend *Konstruktionen der Konquista im Umfeld des Quinto Centenario* as a stimulating introduction to the wide spectrum of Mexican drama and film of the Conquest due to its overall very convincing text analysis, which is based on an in-depth exploration of the discursive framework. However,

considering that most Spanish and Latin American colleagues will unfortunately not be able to read a monograph in German, the author might want to elaborate on selected key aspects in the form of articles to be published in Spanish.

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